

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 IO-13 ADP-00 AF-10 CIAE-00 DODE-00

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R 201135Z JUL 73

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3294

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

USINT BAGHDAD

USINT CAIRO

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 8558

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LE, SY

SUBJECT: SYRIAN-LEBANESE BORDER

1. OUR BEST INFO CONFIRMS REPORTS THAT SARG WILLING
REOPEN BORDER WITHOUT NECESSARILY RECEIVING ADVANCE
GOL CONCESSIONS RE SYRIAN WORKERS, ETC. PROVIDED
LEBANESE PRIM MINISTER WILLING COME TO DAMASCUS AND
REQUEST THAT BORDER BE REOPENED. THIS APPEARS TO BE
WORD BROUGHT BACK FROM DAMASCUS BY SEVERAL SELF-STYLED
INTERMEDIARIES WHO HAVE RECENTLY BEEN THERE. MOREOVER,
SYRIAN DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER RAFEI TOOK SAME LINE IN
TALKING TO USINT DAMASCUS JULY 18.

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2. WE UNDERSTAND THAT ARAB STATES IN GULF AREA AND IRAQ HAVE ALL BEEN PRESSING SARG TO REOPEN BORDER SINCE THEY ARE SUFFERING AS WELL AS LEBANON. SYRIA REPORTEDLY GIVING NO SUBSTANTIVE RESPONSE TO THESE DEMARCHES BUT COMBINATION OF SUCH OUTSIDE PRESSURE, LOSSES TO SYRIA'S OWN ECONOMY, ADVENT OF MORE FRIENDLY GOVT IN LEBANON AND INCREASED STRENGTH OF SAIQA VIS-A-VIS FATAH SEEMS HAVE CAUSED SARG DROP SOME OF APPARENT PRE-CONDITIONS IT HAD BEEN PLACING ON REOPENING BORDER, RESTRICTING DEMAND TO TOP-LEVEL GOL REQUEST. THIS SEEMS BE MOTIVATED BY REASON OF NATIONAL FACE, I.E., SARG WISHES PLACE GOL IN POSITION OF BEGGING FOR REOPENING WITH ACCOMPANYING IMPLICATION THAT SARG WOULD BE WILLING DO LEBANON FAVOR OF REOPENING (AND DISCUSSING SUBSTANTIVE PROBLEMS SUCH AS SYRIAN WORKERS, ETC. AT LATER DATE). PRESIDENT FRANGIE RELIABLY REPORTEDLY OPPOSED TO SUCH APPROACH, CONSIDERING IT HUMILIATING AND DEMEANING FOR LEBANON.

3. IN LEBANON PRESSURES ARE MOUNTING FOR REOPENING OF BORDER, WITH NUMEROUS BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS AND RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL GROUPS EXPRESSING THEMSELVES PUBLICLY. ALSO, AS RESULT OF SPECIAL MEETING HERE 19 JULY, UNION OF ARAB CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND AGRICULTURE DECIDED SEND SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO DAMASCUS TO DISCUSS WITH SARG REOPENING OF BORDER. THIS DECISION TAKEN BY REPS OF NINE ARAB CHAMBERS WHO WERE PRESENT, AFTER CONSIDERABLE DISCUSSION AND AT SUGGESTION OF SYRIAN REP WHO OPPOSED IDEA OF SENDING TELEGRAM TO HAFEZ ASSAD REQUESTING BORDER BE REOPENED. NINE COUNTRIES REPRESENTED WERE KUWAIT, UAE, SYRIA, JORDAN, QATAR, TUNISIA, IRAQ, SAUDI ARABIA AND LEBANON.

4. IN ORDER COUNTERACT LEBANESE UNHAPPINESS DIRECTED AT SYRIA, SYRIAN BAATH AND KAMAL JUMBLATT AND OTHERS ARE TRYING GENERATE POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THESIS THAT GOL SHOULD TAKE FIRST STEP OF REQUESTING REOPENING. JUMBLATT HAS ARTICLE IN HIS PARTY PAPER JULY 20 SAYING THAT LEBANON'S ATTACK ON FEDAYEEN WAS REASON FOR CLOSURE THEREFORE FAULT IS THAT OF GOL RATHER THAN CONFIDENTIAL

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THAT OF SYRIA. HE CHARGES THAT AMERICAN AND ISRAELI INTELLIGENCE ARE BLOCKING VISIT BY TAKIEDDINE SOLH TO DAMASCUS WHICH WOULD LEAD TO REOPENING OF BORDER. ALSO, SYRIAN BAATH ATTEMPTED ORGANIZE MARCH ON BEIRUT JULY 20 BY SOUTHERN FRUIT GROWERS (MANY OF WHOM HARD HIT BY BORDER CLOSURE) WITH AIM OF EMBARRASSING GOL AND INCREASING PRESSURE ON TAKIEDDINE SOLH AND FRANGIE TO MAKE CONCESSION TO SYRIA IN ORDER CALM LOCAL UNREST

GENERATED BY BORDER CLOSURE. MARCH TURNED OFF
WITHOUT INCIDENT THROUGH TIMELY ACTION BY GOVERNOR OF
SOUTH, AS WELL AS GENERAL FEELING THAT SYRIA CLEARLY TO
BLAME AND NOT GOL.
BUFFUM

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